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## ABSTRACT

This document is a chapter in "The Principles and Practice of Educational Management," which aims to provide a systematic and analytical introduction to the study of educational management. The structure of the book reflects the main substantive areas of educational leadership and management, and most of the major themes are covered in the volume's 19 chapters, of which this is one. This chapter examines the wide-ranging policy context of educational management throughout the world. It claims that differences in culture and context should inform researchers as they try to explain why educational systems and institutions have developed in such diverse ways. Many developed countries have transformed their educational systems since the end of the 1980s, and these reforms have often involved the devolution of financial and staff management, leading to institutional self-management. Charter schools mark one example of this devolution of management. Critics of self-management claim that it systematically dismantles the bureaucratic structures that have supported education, leaving in its stead institutions that only project the illusion of control. Evaluating the effectiveness of school autonomy is difficult because it takes on different forms and its nature can vary within and between educational systems in different countries. In South Africa, for example, knowledge, material, time, and assessment are largely controlled by the national or provincial government, and the schools determine their own admission arrangements, which supposedly helps schools avoid discrimination based on race and class. Nevertheless, with the rise in national standards and local management, school leaders at all levels are under increasing pressure to perform. (Contains 24 references.) (RJM)

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## The Policy Context.

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2002

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# 1

## The Policy Context

*Les Bell and Tony Bush*

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### Introduction: educational management and leadership

As editors, we have deliberately chosen *The Principles and Practice of Educational Management* as the title of this book. This is partly because of a belief that 'management' represents a wider range of activities involved in running successful educational organisations than the alternative terms 'administration' and 'leadership'. Educational administration, as used in the United States and Australia, for example, refers to courses very similar to educational management programmes in Britain and many countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. However, in Britain administration has a much narrower meaning, referring to the work of civil servants and local officers rather than to institutional management, except those involved in routine clerical and financial functions.

The field of educational management has tended to include the notion of leadership: 'Management [is] the overarching concept within which leadership is subsumed' (Open University, 1996: 11). Both these terms imply an emphasis on vision, mission and purpose coupled with a capacity to inspire others to work towards the achievement of these aims. Operational management, in relation to budgeting, staff issues, teaching and learning and relationships with parents and the community, are then linked to these strategic aims. Recently, in England and Wales, official bodies have made a firmer distinction between the two concepts and given much greater emphasis to leadership. The former chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), for example, stated that: 'the central issue we need to tackle is leadership, in particular how the qualities of leadership can be identified and fostered' (Millett, 1996). This stance leads to a prescriptive approach to what leaders should do and to the production of lists that foster atomised thinking, because they separate and fragment the work of leaders into categories and create a false dichotomy between leadership and management. The dichotomy is false because effective schools require good leadership *and* good management. As the American writers Bolman and Deal, emphasise: 'The challenge of modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager as well as the

flashes of brilliance of vision and commitment wise leadership provides' (Bolman and Deal, 1991: xiii-xiv).

Assuming a sharp difference between leadership and management is dangerous also because it can lead to allegations of 'managerialism', an emphasis on implementation or the technical aspects of management with little regard for the values and purposes of education. Seeking to promote leadership and management as integrated and complementary aspects of effective organisations helps to ensure that operational management is linked closely to the aims and values of education: 'Erecting this kind of dichotomy between something pure called "leadership" and something "dirty" called "management", or between values and purposes on the one hand and methods and skills on the other, would be disastrous' (Glatter, 1997: 189).

Bell (1999) argues that the prevailing dichotomy between leadership and management is inappropriate because these activities are inextricably linked in all schools and colleges. At its most strategic, management involves formulating a vision for the school based on strongly held values about the aims and purposes of education, and translating this into action in specific institutions. Leadership involves the embodiment and articulation of this vision and its communication to others.

The fundamental flaw in this conceptualisation of educational leadership and management is that it overemphasizes the role of the headteacher or principal. If management at the strategic level involves translating the vision into broad aims and long-term plans, then it is at the organisational level that the strategic view is converted into medium-term objectives supported by the allocation of appropriate resources and the delegation of responsibility for decision-making, implementation, review and evaluation. In turn, at the operational level, resources are utilised, tasks are completed, and activities are co-ordinated and monitored.

These three levels of management, strategic, organisational and operational, must work in harmony towards a common purpose, especially if site-based management is to work effectively. This can happen only if the values and vision are shared by all members of the community. Each level of management depends on the other two. Organisational and operational management can be aimless without clear values and purposes but even the most inspiring leadership will fail if it does not lead to effective implementation. Combining these three levels is the prime function of management.

### **Integrating theory, research and practice**

This book sets out to explore the relationship between research and practice in educational management. Management is essentially a practical activity. Determining aims and strategies, making and implementing plans, managing teaching and learning, people, budgets and external relations, and evaluating

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practice, all require action. However, the action needs to be underpinned by educational values. These provide a set of guidelines about how to behave as leaders and managers. The values, in turn, are linked to principles or theories of management. For example, a commitment to full participation of teachers and school governors in the decision-making process represents a belief in collegiality whether or not the managers have an explicit awareness of this model. Similarly, the assumptions underpinning educational reform, in England and Wales, and elsewhere, are based on a *de facto* rational model: 'Governing bodies and headteachers are expected to link their financial planning to their educational policies in an overtly rational process' (Bush, 1999: 247).

As well as being grounded in an explicit awareness of theory, it is important that management practice should be based on research evidence. In many countries, there is an explicit relationship between theory, research, policy and practice. This is evident in Ontario, Canada, for example, where aspiring school principals follow a course which is underpinned by research on school leadership, notably that of the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education (OISE). The work of leading academics, such as Leithwood et al. (1999), is mediated and applied by experienced school principals who, in turn, are regular participants in OISE seminars on school leadership (Bush and Jackson, 2002). In addition, the course requires participants to research their own practice as a key element of the process of evaluation and review.

In the early years of the new millennium, there is increasing interest in research on educational leadership and management in England and Wales. Participants in the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) are expected to conduct in-school enquiries as part of their assessment. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has a funded teacher-researcher scheme while the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) has appointed a Director of Research and School Improvement and is involved in several initiatives to link research with school leadership and management practice.

The underlying message from these initiatives is that teaching and management should be research-based professions. Practice without theory and research neglects previous findings and experience and risks repeating the mistakes of the past. An explicit awareness of theory and research provides the potential for informed decision-making: 'Managers in all organisations . . . can increase their effectiveness and their freedom through the use of multiple vantage points. To be locked into a single path is likely to produce error and self-imprisonment' (Bolman and Deal, 1984: 4).

In searching for solutions to problems, or identifying ways of tackling complex issues, educational leaders need to be aware of research findings to see what has worked well in similar situations. Research findings often lead to 'grounded theories' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which can provide the

conceptual frameworks for managers seeking ways of responding to difficult events or situations. These frameworks may be drawn from education or from commerce and industry.

### **Management within and outside education**

Educational management as a field of study and practice was derived from management principles first applied to industry and commerce, mainly in the United States. Dependence on imported ideas, from other countries and other management settings, has reduced as educational management has become an established discipline with its own theories and some empirical data to test their validity in education. This transition has been accompanied by lively argument about the extent to which education should be regarded as simply another field for the application of general principles of management or be seen as a separate field with its own body of knowledge.

One view is that there are general principles of management which can be applied to all organisational settings (Handy, 1984). This 'general principles' case rests largely upon the functions thought to be common to different types of organisation. These include strategic planning, financial management, human resource management and relationships with the organisation's clients and the wider community. The alternative argument is that the management of education is sufficiently different to merit separate provision for the development of school and college managers. The case for distinctive treatment is based on the difficulty of defining, and measuring the achievement of, educational objectives, the presence of children and young people as the 'outputs' of schools and colleges, and the special role of teachers as professionals (Bush, 1995).

The debate about the most appropriate relationship between general management and that specific to education has been rekindled since 1995 with the Teacher Training Agency's clear emphasis on the need to take account of 'best practice outside education' in devising professional development programmes for head teachers in England. This stance is partly driven by political imperatives; satisfying the ideologically driven view that the private sector has much to teach, and little to learn, from education. It fails to recognise that many chief executives of business companies do not work with as much complexity as educational leaders, and that many would find it challenging to run a school. However, it does rest on the valid assumption that management in education should be able to benefit from good practice wherever it occurs.

While taking account of 'best practice' appears sensible, identifying it is not a straightforward, rational process. Who decides what good, let alone 'best', practice is? How is such good practice to be adapted for use in training school leaders? Is good practice a universal trait, or does it depend on the

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specific school setting as well as the broader organisational context? Glatter (1997: 187) shows that this issue is highly problematic: 'It is not always very clear what constitutes best practice in management outside education. As in education itself, there are different approaches and contending schools of thought.'

This issue has returned to the forefront of debate at a time when research on school effectiveness and school improvement (Stoll, 1996) is emphasising the need for leaders to focus most strongly on the specifically educational topics of learning and teaching rather than the generic tasks of managing staff, finance and external relations. This suggests that schools, rather than industry and commerce, should remain the main focus of management learning for educational leaders. As Bell notes in his chapter for this volume, however, the relationship between education and industry has now become more complex. Industrial and commercial organisations are now being encouraged to become full partners in the educational enterprise. This partnership can take several different forms. Education Action Zones in England are based on the involvement of business organisations while most schools in China operate their own businesses to generate income and those in Hungary have developed partnerships with industry in order to survive.

This volume seeks to stimulate an awareness of theory and practice in schools and colleges based on research in a wide range of educational settings in different countries and cultures. However, much management practice is grounded in educational principles which are sometimes fully articulated but often only implicit in action. There may also be tensions between those educational principles and both the policy context and the wider societal systems within which schools and colleges are located. This may be particularly true when Western management practices are applied to other cultures and contexts.

### **Culture and context**

This book is intended for an international audience in recognition that many of the major themes of educational management have global significance. Notions of bureaucracy, autonomy and control, accountability and quality, for example, are evident in many different countries. However, it is vital to be aware of the powerful differences between countries and not to overestimate their similarities. Some of the problems may be the same but their solutions often depend more on local circumstances than on importing ready-made answers from very different contexts. Ron Glatter, in this volume, cautions against over-simplification of international issues: 'It is easy to become over-impressed by apparent similarities between "reforms" in various countries and to neglect deep differences at the level of implementation and practice' (Glatter, 2002: 225).

Crossley and Broadfoot (1992: 100) urge a respect for context and state that: 'policies and practice cannot be translated intact from one culture to another since the mediation of different cultural contexts can quite transform the former's salience'. Hughes makes a similar point in noting the need to focus on the unique qualities of different contexts in assessing educational management practice: 'The uncritical transportation of theories and methodologies across the world, without regard to the qualities and circumstances of different communities, can no longer be regarded as acceptable' (Hughes 1990: 3).

It may also be unwise to assume that educational issues are common even *within* countries let alone between them. It was evident in conducting research on school management in China, for example, that there were considerable differences between urban and rural schools (Bush et al., 1998). Similarly, the new South Africa is still coming to terms with the institutionalised differences in its schools arising from the apartheid era. Comparing the former 'white' schools in the major cities with deep rural schools provides as sharp a contrast as the differences between developed and developing countries (Bush and Heystek, forthcoming).

Some of the differences between educational systems can be attributed to economics. Many developing countries do not have the resources to ensure universal education, even at primary level, or to provide buildings, equipment or staffing of the quality which is taken for granted in the developed world. These countries are caught in a vicious circle. They lack the resources to develop all their children to their full potential. This contributes to a continuing economic weakness because they do not have the skills to compete effectively in high-tech industries or in the global service sector. As a result, the tax base is too weak to fund a really effective educational system.

Although the economic issues should not be underestimated, the main differences between countries may be cultural. Dimmock and Walker, in this volume, provide an extended discussion of societal culture and it will suffice here to note that cultural differences play an important part in explaining the varied approaches to apparently similar issues in many different countries. One example relates to attitudes to bureaucracy in different countries. As Bush notes in Chapter 3, it is the preferred model in many countries, including Eastern Europe, China and South America. In some Western countries, however, it is associated with inefficiency and excessive centralisation and may be linked to managerialism, as we noted earlier. The differences may be explained by alternative perspectives on the nature of authority with those favouring bureaucracy more willing to defer to those holding positional power than people who feel constrained by it.

Differences in culture and context should be uppermost in the minds of international researchers seeking to explain why educational systems and institutions have developed in such diverse ways.

### **Autonomy and control**

Many developed countries have transformed their educational systems since the end of the 1980s. The reforms have often involved the devolution of financial and staff management direct to schools and colleges, leading to institutional self-management. This includes local management of schools (LMS) in England and Wales, where school governing bodies receive their own budgets, and Charter schools in the United States, where parents are empowered to establish their own schools with public funding (Yancey, 2000).

Charter schools also provide an important example of another aspect of these reforms, enhanced parental choice of school. Parents are cast in the role of consumer with the right to select the most appropriate educational experience for their children. Similarly, open enrolment in England and Wales gives parents the opportunity to express a preference for the school their children will attend. They do not have an absolute choice because demand sometimes exceeds the supply of places. The roles may then be reversed with schools choosing children in accordance with their, often diverse, admissions policies.

The main assumption underpinning self-management is that decisions for individual units within the educational system should be made by people within those schools rather than by national or local politicians or officials. The argument is that principals, staff and governors are able to tailor spending to the perceived requirements of their pupils while national and local decision-makers, however well intentioned, can only determine priorities on the basis of perceived national or local need (Bush, 1999). An OECD synthesis of studies in nine countries gives a cautious welcome to self-management and concludes that it is likely to be beneficial:

Greater autonomy in schools . . . [leads] to greater effectiveness through greater flexibility in and therefore better use of resources; to professional development selected at school level; to more knowledgeable teachers and parents, so to better financial decisions; to whole school planning and implementation with priorities set on the basis of data about student [outcomes] and needs. (Quoted in Thomas and Martin, 1996: 28)

This judgement suggests that the theoretical case for self-management has been borne out in practice but there are sceptics who take a different view. They argue that it is a way of deflecting criticism from governments for policies emanating from the centre but implemented, in their detail, by school governors and managers (Ball, 1994; Smyth, 1996). The latter claims, from an Australian perspective, that self-management has several limitations:

- It is a mandated form of self-management; schools have no choice.
- It is occurring in a context of sharply reduced central provision of resources for public education.

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- The supposed decentralisation of power is illusory and the reality is an intensification of central control.

The bureaucratic structures that have traditionally supported the work of teaching are progressively dismantled and schools are converted to stand-alone institutions in which there is only an illusion of a shift in power and control. (Smyth, 1996)

Ball (1994: 78) argues that the presence of the National Curriculum in England and Wales means that there is no real autonomy. 'Self-management is a mechanism for delivering reform rather than a vehicle for institutional initiative and innovation'. Ball expresses concern about the changes in the working conditions of staff and concludes with an attack on 'the textual apologists of self-management'. These texts are firmly imbricated in the construction of new forms of control (Ball, 1994: 83).

Ball's comment goes to the heart of the debate about self-management; what is the most appropriate balance between autonomy and control in twenty-first century educational systems? Despite the negative views of Smyth (1996) and Ball (1994), there is a strong case for devolution of powers to school level so that decisions can be made at the 'point of delivery' rather than in offices remote from students and teachers. The bureaucratic centralism which still characterises many educational systems often leads to a compliance model rather than one which favours initiative and local decision-making. In South America, for example, educational systems are fundamentally bureaucratic:

Among the most outstanding characteristics of the Spanish American educational systems . . . is the high degree of centralisation . . . all decisions relating to educational matters [are] taken by suitably qualified civil servants and the teaching institutions throughout the land . . . fall under their control. In addition, governmental power tends to be very concentrated. (Newland, 1995: 103)

Newland (1995) states that most Spanish American countries are administered through a similar structure headed by a ministry of education and an education council whose members are appointed by the government. He refers to several problems arising from this bureaucratic framework:

1. Educational programmes were too uniform and failed to respect regional and rural differences, giving priority to city schools.
2. Bureaucracy discouraged innovations in teaching and learning.
3. Parents were prevented from taking part in basic educational decisions.
4. There are serious inefficiencies, including high levels of absenteeism, for example 20 per cent in Buenos Aires, which are tolerated by the bureaucracies.
5. Security of tenure, and the power of teacher unions, makes it impossible to remove incompetent teachers.

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Self-managing school systems avoid some of these problems but there is little doubt that school autonomy remains conditional. Curricula and pedagogy may be prescribed, leading to a reduction in professional discretion and limited teacher autonomy. The literacy and numeracy hours in English and Welsh primary schools are good examples of prescription in respect of both content and delivery, leaving only limited opportunity for professionals to use their expertise in teaching these core subjects.

Evaluating the effectiveness of school autonomy is difficult also because it takes on different forms and its nature can vary within and between educational systems. It is easy to present a simplistic view of autonomy as one of two alternative forms of governance in which all matters of importance are delegated to the school. The other alternative in this oversimplified model is where nothing is delegated and all decisions are taken by a central authority. The reality is much more complex. Autonomy can vary along a number of different dimensions. One of the first and most widely respected discussions of this concept provides the following definition of those elements that might be delegated to autonomous schools:

- knowledge (decisions relating to curriculum, including decisions relating to the goals or ends of schooling)
- technology (decisions relating to the means of teaching and learning)
- power (authority to make decisions)
- material (decisions relating to the use of facilities, supplies and equipment)
- people (decisions relating to the allocation of people in matters relating to teaching and learning, and the support of teaching and learning)
- time (decisions relating to the allocation of time)
- finance (decisions related to the allocation of money) (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988: 5).

Thomas and Martin (1996) suggest four items which might be included in this list:

- funding (decisions over fees to be charged for the admission of pupils and other income generating matters)
- admission arrangements (decisions over which pupils are to be admitted to the school).
- assessment (decisions over how pupils are to be assessed)
- information (decisions over the selection of data to be published about the school's performance).

One further factor might be added:

- school governance (decisions over the power and composition of the governing body).

Post-apartheid South Africa provides an interesting example of the ways in which these decisions might be allocated. Knowledge, material, time and assessment are largely controlled by the national or provincial governments. Schools are able to determine their own admission arrangements. These are supposed to avoid discrimination on the grounds of race or class but in practice such devices as advertising in the 'white' press, and charging high fees, restrict the access of poorer children, most of them black. Schools also decide their own 'top up' fees, subject to the agreement of parents. Technology and time are also devolved but the former depends on the facilities available to schools, and these vary substantially, as noted earlier. There is only limited devolution of power and 'people' but there is provision for elections to school governing bodies (Bush and Heystek, forthcoming).

Autonomy is a complex notion, as the South African example demonstrates, but it seems likely that this will become an increasingly attractive dimension of educational systems. It provides the potential for schools to be more responsive to their parents and local communities which may want greater involvement in decision-making, particularly if they are required to contribute to school funding, which is now the case in many countries. Although governments wish to retain control of many aspects of educational institutions, they may also acknowledge that effective implementation of national policies depends on devolving sufficient power to ensure that all involved in the school community are motivated to participate in meaningful decision-making for the benefit of pupils and students.

### **Conclusion: educational management in the twenty-first century**

Educational systems are being restructured in many parts of the world. This is often because governments are seeking to improve the quality of educational outputs to increase competitiveness in the global economy. A highly educated workforce is seen as a major way of promoting flexibility in an era of technological change, and developed countries seek to retain their strong economies by investing heavily in education to prepare workers with basic and advanced skills. Education is also a priority in developing nations but here the emphasis is often to ensure that there is a universal system of primary education with some progression to secondary education and a limited university sector. The lack of resources to invest in education serves to widen the divide between the advanced and developing economies.

The restructuring often takes the form of greater decentralisation of powers to schools or local administrative bodies to enhance responsiveness to the needs of local communities. While the pressures of the global economy may drive such systemic changes, the nature of the innovations need to be grounded in local traditions and 'culture' if they are to achieve their objec-

tives. Importing ready-made solutions from other contexts is unlikely to work well. Global problems require local responses.

The huge expectations imposed on educational establishments has led to a significant change in the nature and scale of accountability. Increasingly, leaders have to meet nationally imposed targets and face penalties, including dismissal, if they do not succeed. This has led to an increase in negative stress, resulting in resignations and early retirements in some developed countries, including England. Such systemic pressures need to be matched by enhanced support mechanisms if the negative consequences of reform are not to outweigh the intended benefits.

Senior educational managers, including principals and headteachers, are particularly vulnerable to such negative effects and need to construct and sustain working frameworks and processes that recognise that leadership and management skills are needed at many points in the organisation. Promoting team work helps in developing such capabilities and also provides the potential for supportive networks for all managers, teachers, staff and students. The demands on educational institutions have never been so great and schools and colleges need to find new ways of working that meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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